

Eastern MRS Meeting Notes
July 30th, 2008
Johnston County DSS

Counties Present: Bladen, Camden, Franklin, Halifax, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Martin, Nash, Northampton, Pender, Pitt, Robeson, Sampson, Vance, Wilson.

Introductions

Announcements – Children's Services

Shared Parenting

CFT Policy

CFT Observations

Moving Forward with MRS

Announcements

- MRS Institute!! Don't forget! Note - presenters will not count in your guaranteed three participants.
- JoAnn has announced her retirement effective November.
- Passed our IVE review.
- Policy changes – court chapter and CFT chapter have been approved. Still in the process of getting this information out to the counties. Part of the delay around the court chapter involves programming the new permanency plan code into the CPPS system (5094). The programming is out of the Division's control and we have to wait until it can be added.
- Are going to start only having DCD letters come out 2 days a month (think the first and the 15th of the month). That way you will know when they may come out and not be concerned that you may be missing something. This will probably start in August.

Shared Parenting

Rick Zechman presented on this. The only thing that has really been in policy around SP was that you must have one within 7 days. Wanted to flesh that out and include more information around SP. Have been talking to trainers, foster care, licensing, and policy consultants. Took a lot of the material from the Shared Parenting training and incorporated it into this policy, which will be located in the Placement Manual. Wanted to get some information from this group about where you would like specific guidance.

- Wanted provide some guidance around starting to have conversations with parents when it looks like a possibility that children will come into care.
- Wanted to acknowledge that children may want to maintain a relationship with the foster parents post permanency. This is ok, but need to plan for this from the get-go.
- Holly wanted to recognize Nash county as one of the pioneers and leaders in Shared Parenting

Comments

- Nash county said that Shared Parenting is not an event, the one time meeting, it is a process.
- One of the other counties has monthly group meetings where foster parents can talk to each other about Shared Parenting.
- How are you overcoming the foster parents fear of birth parents?
 - One county addresses this in MAPP and they think it is working well.
 - The birth parents are just as scared of the foster parents as vice versa and one county has had a birth parent come to MAPP.
 - Having some general outline of what to talk about, how long should it be, what are appropriate topics makes the foster parents feel more comfortable so they don't feel they are going in blind.
- What are important things to talk about at the first meeting?
 - Health, education, sleeping routines, fears, eating habits, etc.
 - Religion and possible differences.
- One county asked how counties are handling private licensing agencies – are these agencies training their foster parents on shared parenting?
 - One county said their therapeutic home foster parents are being trained on it.
 - Earlier on there was some resistance to this, but a lot of this has gone away – have educated folks and also let the providers know that this is the way DSS will be doing business.
 - We don't have the authority over them in the sense that we do with DSS foster families, but we are their customer, and we do not have to use them again if they do not follow the Shared Parenting principles.
- What about involvement of any other relatives? Do counties do this, consider it, why or why not?
 - Nash involves them if they have been involved in caring for that child before the child came into care.
 - If the relative was a very involved caregiver, they have important info, that even the birth parents may not.
 - Consider that unlike CFTs, where we want parents to bring as many supports as possible, if the birth parents already have all their supports at the Shared Parenting meeting, they are more reluctant to develop a relationship with the foster parents, and that is the whole purpose of the meeting.
- Remember the difference between a CFT and a Shared Parenting meeting:
 - CFT = goal is to develop a case plan
 - Shared Parenting = goal to develop a relationship
- How about involving absent parents?
 - Depends, how much were they involved before, or how involved have they been since DSS involvement?
 - Question should always be, how can we involve them? You never know what information they might have – we may assume that they don't have any but we don't know.
- Challenges to the 7 day deadline?

- This is a challenge for most counties here. Its hard to get them scheduled because there is so much to do when a child comes into care. Plus transferring to new worker which is a whole new set of paperwork.
- If you can do them at the day one conference, everyone is already there, so there is no extra logistical coordination.
- Sometimes might want to use a different worker than the removal worker – sometimes the worker and the family can continue to work together, the removal is not a surprise to the family, but other times the relationship is not good, and having anyone else there (foster care worker, CFT facilitator, any other DSS worker) would ease the tension and allow folks to concentrate on the relationship building between parents instead of the resentment of the birth parents toward the social worker.
- Increased success if the foster care worker is aware this will happen before the children are in care. If the agency knows its coming, then the foster care worker can begin getting prepared before the children are in care.
- Nash has them the day of placement. If you wait, they feel that they have lost a week that can never be gotten back – the stress for children, birth, and foster parents is less.
- Feels foster parents are more able to calm birth parents down that the DSS social workers can after the children have been taken into care.
- How do counties prepare for post permanency?
 - One county has been ordered to cease reunification and they are making plans because the birth mom realizes she can't care for her children, and she wants the foster parents to keep her children, so they are working out the details of what will be best (guardianship, adoption, etc.) that will also allow the birth mother to be some part of her children's life.
 - Once you let the birth parents see the foster parents and realize that they are people too, and they care about their children, it makes a big difference in their attitude.
- Social workers should start talking about Shared Parenting with the birth families while they are still in 210 or 215, when things start heading in a direction that might lead to removal that is the time to start talking about these things.
- Its scary for both sets of parents. Foster parents have to meet people that may have criminal records and substance abuse issues, and the birth parents have to meet these people that they see as "super parents" that the government has said can raise their children better than they can.
- Its not all or nothing. There are many things you can do short of exchanging addresses. Each situation will be looked at individually and only what is appropriate and safe will be shared. Also, foster parents need to realize that even if there was never a Shared Parenting meeting the birth parents could

probably find out where they live anyway. Kids could talk, could drive by the house and see the children (in a small town), etc.

- Share with foster parents that there is a significant reduction in CPS reports filed on foster parents when they are successfully practicing Shared Parenting.

CFT Policy

Policy should be on-line very soon – won't get a hard copy yet because there is so much new policy coming out.

- Families were involved in creating this definition.
- Matthew Jones and his mom speak on their experiences with CFTs. He was having mental health issues leading to troubles with school and he was not invested in CFTs but what made him decide to give it a try was that he was able to choose the location and he could bring a friend of his to the meeting. He also did not want the school to be there because he had to be there all day and he was sick of them. Even though the school was where he was having issues, they let him not invite them to the first meeting, and after the first one, he was convinced it would help to have them there. It also came out at the meeting that his dream was to have his own business. So they started talking to him about what would be needed to have his own business, a drivers license, and math skills, so he saw a investment in school on his own and both mental health and the school got their needs met without forcing themselves on the family.
- Definition - Child and Family Teams are family members and their community supports that come together to create, implement and update a plan *with* the child, youth and family. The plan builds on the strengths of the child, youth and family and addresses their needs, desires and dreams.
- CFT meetings in Assessment
 - Not required, unless a petition is going to be filed during assessment, and the child's safety is not compromised by the holding of a meeting
 - Can be used for safety planning
 - Special care needs to be taken to be clear with all participants, that while there is an ongoing assessment, in which much information will be gathered, this is not the purpose of this meeting
 - Initial preparation for CFT should always begin in Assessment
- CFT in In-Home Services
 - Whenever a Service Agreement is due
 - When the family requests one
 - Critical Decisions
 - *Prior to case closure for repeat recipients of In-Home Services*
 - Don't forget those collaterals!!
- Foster Care and Adoption
 - Any time a Service Agreement and/or a PPAT is due
 - At the family's request
 - Critical decisions (return home, placement change)
 - Should address concurrent plans

- Will continue after reunification is ceased, team *may* change, but meetings should continue
 - For children whose parents are no longer involved, the child should be consulted as to who they see as their supports and these choices should be honored
- Combining CFT and PPAT (and others)
 - The critical point here is the inclusion of GAL and Community Rep. Hold discussion with family to ascertain if they will agree to this.
 - We all know how precious time is; with a little planning and collaboration other meetings may be able to be rolled into a CFT.
- Preparation
 - Early and often
 - Prepare *all* participants
 - Developing team
 - Safety issues
 - Identifying non-negotiables
 - Time, place, cultural touches
 - Focus/goal of meeting
 - Ground rules
 - Absent parents
 - Mentor/support person
 - Involving children—Not an “if”, but a “how”
- Looking Inward
 - What are your personal feelings about the issues
 - How might they influence you
 - How can you assure that you leave them at the door
- Looking Outward
 - Building relationships with community partners
 - Developing informal resources
 - Educate partners
 - Ask for what you need!
- Special Considerations
 - DV cases
 - Older youth with no, or “hidden” family
- Facilitator
 - Must be used in High and Intensive risk cases
 - Not a part of the team—no opinion
 - May keep notes
 - May help with prep
- What's Important for documentation
 - Developing the team
 - Preparing all team members
 - Who was invited/who attended
 - Special features
 - Ideas of all team members
 - How one strategy was chosen over another

- Child involvement
- Absent parents
- Culture
- Not a checklist
- Training

CFT Observations

Nicole from Duke talked about the tool. It was developed by the Psych Department at University of Washington. They have selected 5 counties where they will be observing the CFT meetings. 5 observations in the 1st 6 months of the fiscal year, the provide feedback, give them a chance to evaluate feedback, and then do 5 more.

- This is something that counties can use themselves if they are not one of the 5. Nicole did a mini training, but can provide more if an individual county would like further information.
- Organized around 10 principles with 3-5 questions for each one. (Family voice and choice, team based, natural supports, collaboration, community based, culturally competent, individualized, strengths based, persistence, outcome based).
- Counties can use this tool to assess county level CFTs, identify strengths, areas for improvement, etc.
- Duke will be developing a database to record this information and could provide a copy of their database (not the data, but the database itself) so that counties could track their own performance.

September Meetings:

Central: Orange County – September 17th

Western: AB Tech September date TBA

Eastern: Onslow – September 30th